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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Thirty-eighth session
New York, 7-18 March 1994
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Statement submitted by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category II

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A serious review of the life cycle of a woman would show that social attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes hamper the normal physical and mental development of millions of women. Practices and rituals which violate basic human rights to health and life are maintained in the name of tradition and custom.

If we take the life cycle of an African female child it would read as follows:

Born from a young under-nourished mother;

Received at birth with discriminatory rituals;

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* E/CN.6/1994/1.

Undergone genital mutilation (FGM);

Assuming several household chores without priority for education, health care and nutrition;

Employment and ownership of property not ensured;

Marriage being the sole guarantee for social security.

Gender-based discrimination has several faces and forms of manifestation and female genital mutilation is the epitome of this reality.

The act itself and the manner in which it is carried out violates basic human rights to health and life. Female genital mutilation violates the principles laid down in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 24.3) stipulates the need for measures to be taken against practices prejudicial to the health of children.

Taking into serious consideration the indivisibility and universality of human rights, no conditionality, including cultural or religious specificity, can justify the performance of female genital mutilation. The lives of over 100 million women are affected by this practice.

The Commission on Human Rights and its subsidiary body the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities took an important step forward in this domain by appointing a Special Rapporteur to study the phenomena of traditional practices affecting the health of women and children. The report of the Special Rapporteur (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/6) showed the gravity of the problem of genital mutilation and other such practices. Several pertinent proposals were made for the eradication of harmful traditional practices which need a serious follow-up to ensure their implementation.

The Inter-African Committee welcomes the recent resolution adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA46.18) last May in relation to the elimination of female genital mutilation.

A collective universal recognition and identification of female genital mutilation as violence against women and a shared commitment to eliminate it, are urgent actions to be taken in order to free women from such inhuman and degrading treatment. The Commission on the Status of Women should take urgent action to stop this practice and to support all national endeavours to this end.

The Inter-African Committee urges the Commission on the Status of Women to set up a special working group in order to study the problem of traditional practices at the national, regional and international levels.

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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Thirty-eighth session
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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Statement submitted by the Medical Women's International Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category II

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* E/CN.6/1994/1.

Annex

STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY THE MEDICAL WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

The Medical Women's International Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, welcomes the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Women in urban areas: Population, nutrition and health factors for women in development, including migration, drug consumption and acquired immune deficiency syndrome" (E/CN.6/1994/3), and urges that measures be taken to end all forms of discrimination against women.

As women doctors, we are concerned that women's vulnerability arising from social, political and economic inequalities worldwide seriously affects their health throughout their lives. Women must not be denied the most fundamental of all human rights - health - defined by the World Health Organization as the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of health without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.

Numerous studies have shown that women's health status has an important impact on the health of their children, the family, the community and the environment.

To guarantee health for women at all stages of their lives, health facilities should be made available and accessible and should respect the autonomy of the individual.

Governments must ensure that:

(a) Health statistics are gender-specific;

(b) Gender deficiencies in the utilization of health services and treatment are investigated;

(c) Research on women-specific health problems and disease transmission is supported;

(d) Strategies are developed to overcome gender deficiencies in the area of health.

Women must be actively involved in the planning, research and implementation of all such programmes.

Governments must ensure that women have the same access as men to affordable, curative, preventative and rehabilitative treatment.

Therefore, the Medical Women's International Association requests the Member States of the United Nations to fulfil and implement their commitments to the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to ensure their basic human right to health.